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ABSTRACT

This document argues that packaged guidance curriculum activities are intended for general populations and often fail to address the needs of certain communities or to be responsive to specific events. A process is then presented which enables counselors to design their own activities. The process described is based on an experiential learning model with five steps: (1) experiencing; (2) publishing; (3) processing;(4) generalizing; and (5) application, to which the step of development of objectives is added. It is recommended that objectives be specific and appropriate, with no more than two objectives for each 20 to 40 minute activity. An effective experience phase is suggested to generate information relevant to the exercise by incorporating role-playing, reflection, problem-solving, games, artwork, or films. The publishing phase is presented as an attempt to surface reactions to the experience phase, usually by asking questions related to the objectives. In the processing phase the counselor is instructed to summarize responses, make note of them, and encourage students to draw their own conclusions. A discussion of the generalizing phase focuses on the need to present concepts that will help students to organize and understand their experiences. The final phase, the application phase, involves student practice of the skills and knowledge they have learned from the guidance activity. The paper concludes that guidance activities developed to meet specific needs are more likely to meet those needs than are generalized packaged activities. (ABL)

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Guidelines for the Development of Guidance Activities

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Running Head: DEVELOPING ACTIVITIES

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Guidelines for the Development of Guidance Activities

Abstract

Limitations of packaged guidance curriculum are discussed. It is suggested that guidance activities designed to respond to special needs, current events, concerns of specific population, and community issues are more relevant and more likely to be helpful.

A process designed to help counselors develop, present, and evaluate guidance activities is presented. This six stage process is based on an experiential learning cycle. It has the following components: developing objectives, designing the activity, publishing reaction, processing responses, generalizing, and applying.

Guidelines for the Development of Guidance Activities

Activities found in packaged guidance curriculum are intended to provide students with the skills, concepts, and understanding necessary to work through normal developmental concerns (Bernard & Joyce, 1985). Because they are designed to be appropriate for general populations and generic concerns they are often not sensitive to issues specific to certain communities (e.g., a plant closing), nor can they be immediately responsive to significant events (e.g., the explosion of the space shuttle). Counselors who are able to design activities relevant to the special needs of various student populations can provide a more pertinent and more responsive emotional education program.

The goal of this article is to explain a process that will enable counselors to design their own guidance activities. Suggestions will also be made about the presentation and evaluation of these activities.

DESIGN PROCESS

The design process discussed in this article is based on the experiential learning model presented by Jones and Pfieffer (1973). This model consists of five steps: experiencing, publishing, processing, generalizing, and application. The design process presented here appends an

initial step; the development of specific objectives. Thus the suggested design process consists of six steps having the following functions: determining and specifying the objectives, developing the experience, constructing a method to publish reactions to the experience, processing the reactions, deciding on the concepts to be presented, and deciding how to apply the concepts.

Objectives

The effectiveness of the activity depends on the specificity and appropriateness of its objectives. Effective objectives describe precisely what students are to learn (Mager, 1984). If the objective of the activity is to learn about feelings, the counselor needs to determine specifically what about feelings the student should learn. Objectives for an activity dealing with feelings could be as follows: a) students will learn five feeling words and b) students will learn appropriate ways to express these feelings.

Generally speaking no more than two specific objectives should accompany each 20 to 40 minute activity. The number of objectives may vary depending on the type and duration of the experience and the ages and ability of the participants.

A check counselors can use to evaluate the effectiveness of their statement of objectives is to see if the following

question can be answered in specific terms: "What exactly do I want students to learn as a result of this activity?"

Experience

The key to an effective experiencing phase is an activity that will generate information relevant to the objectives of the exercise. Ideally the activity should stimulate data about thinking, feeling, and behaving in a given situation. Types of experiences include role-playing (e.g., Have students assume the role of a student who has just been left out of a game.), reflection (e.g., Have students think of a time when they have had a sad experience.), or problem-solving and decision-making (e.g., Have students role-play a family that must decide what they should do about a child who steals or lies.). Other types of activities would include simulations (e.g., Treat students differentially according to eye color.), games (e.g., Play a concentration game with feeling words.), artwork (e.g., Have students draw a picture of a situation when they have experienced a loss.), or films and short stories (e.g., Read a story about a child of divorced parents.).

The experience phase should follow logically from the activity's objectives. If the objective is to help students share their thoughts and feelings about a parent who has recently lost a job, students should be involved in an

experience which is consistent with that situation (e.g., Have students role-play a family where a parent has been laid off.).

Useful checks for the experience phase of the activity are the following questions: "What exactly will the students do?" and "How will this experience generate data that is consistent with the objectives of the activity?" If these questions can be answered in specific terms, it is likely that the experience will be effective.

Publishing

The goal of the publishing phase is to surface thinking, feeling, and behavioral reactions to the experiencing phase. Publishing usually involves the presentation of questions after the experiencing phase has been completed. These questions are connected to the objectives of the activity and the content to be presented in the generalizing phase. If an objective of the activity is to help students share their feelings when a parent gets angry at them and a role-play experience was used, a publishing question might be, "What feelings did you have when the person playing the part of your parent got angry?"

Publishing can take various forms; written or oral responses to written questions, verbal responses to questions presented verbally by the counselor, small group reports, or

responses to a questionnaire. It is important that data is collected and displayed so that all can see it and the counselor can use it during the processing phase. When the data to be surfaced during this phase of the activity is highly sensitive anonymous written responses are appropriate. In early elementary grades the publishing phase is usually limited to verbal processing.

When deciding how many questions to use, the following factors should be considered: time, number of concepts covered in the generalizing phase, ages of the students involved, the intellectual ability of the students, etc. Roughly speaking questions should cover feelings, thinking, and behavior.

Counselors should be clear about the reactions that need to be surfaced to accomplish the objectives of the activity. Therefore specific answers to the following questions are useful: "What exactly is the data necessary to meet the objectives of the activity?" and "What questions will help students to present this data?"

Processing

Once responses to the publishing questions have been presented and recorded, the counselor should summarize the responses and describe consistencies. Consistencies are treated as themes. For example, the counselor might note that

everyone said that they would feel embarrassed and angry if a friend told one of their secrets to another person. When answers to the publishing questions differ the counselor should ask for more information to clarify the response and support the person whose response is different. The processing phase is designed to encourage students to draw their own conclusions, not for the counselor to tell students what is right or wrong.

Checks at this point are procedural and not primary design considerations. Before concluding this phase the following questions should be answered affirmatively: "Have I thoroughly discussed and clarified their responses?" and "Have I identified the ideas and themes emerging from the discussion (especially the ones relevant to the objectives)?"

Generalizing

Once the data have been thoroughly processed the counselor should present concepts that will help students organize and understand their experience. For instance, the counselor may present information about the common experiences of children of recently divorced parents. As the counselor presents this information he/she should frequently use the information generated in the publishing phase (especially the themes) as examples. This phase is devoted to presenting information that will help students develop a better

understanding of their experience, find that they share thoughts and feelings with others, learn about the consequences of their behavior, and more fully comprehend the feelings, behaviors, and motivations of others.

Clear answers to the following questions serve as useful checks for the generalizing phase: "What are the concepts necessary to understand this experience and to better deal with similar situations in the future?" and "Have these concepts been employed in the activity?" At the procedural level these questions should be answered affirmatively: "Have I applied these concepts to their responses?" and "Have I checked to assure that they understand the concepts I have presented?"

Applying

The application phase involves students in practicing skills and/or discussing how learnings might be applied in their own situations. This phase may involve role-play practice with feedback or the presentation of a scenario where students discuss how they might respond. The counselor is encouraged to utilize questions which help students personalize the principles (e.g., How would you express your feelings if you were angry with a friend?).

Checks of how well this phase is designed are the following questions: "Exactly how do I want them to apply the

concepts and/or skills?" and "How do the experiences in which I will involve them help them apply the concepts and/or skills to their own lives?"

Discussion

Guidance activities relevant to the specific needs of students are more likely to respond to the immediate concerns of students. These activities should be developed and conducted within the parameters of an on-going guidance program and should be employed when the guidance program is not meeting the current needs of the students. The process discussed offers a practical approach to the design, evaluation, and implementation of relevant guidance activities.

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